

# The A.B.L.E. Program: A Specially Designed Adaptive Sports Program for Youth With Complex Disabilities

Sarah Lindsey<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Medical University of South Carolina, Charleston, South Carolina, United States

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Primary Author and Speaker: Sarah Lindsey, [lindsesa@musc.edu](mailto:lindsesa@musc.edu)

**BACKGROUND:** Participation in sports is an important aspect of life for children and adolescents as it can provide significant physical, psychological, and social benefits (Eime et al., 2013). Youth with disabilities are also able to reap the same benefits of participation in adaptive sports, but unfortunately there are a limited number of programs available for youth with more significant medical conditions (Ryan et al., 2014).

**PURPOSE:** Therefore, the aim of this study was to explore the need for, and creation of a new, specially designed multi-sports program called the A.B.L.E. Program (Athletes Believing Limits are Endless) for children and adolescents with complex disabilities.

**DESIGN AND METHOD:** A prospective mixed method study was conducted via Redcap surveys and phone interviews to determine the perceptions of 1) caregivers of youth with complex disabilities on the current state of local adaptive sport programs and desire for additional programming, 2) experts in children with complex disabilities on how to best serve this population, and 3) experts in adaptive sports programming on how to create and run a successful program. Results were analyzed both through peer-reviewed thematic analysis and descriptive statistics of frequencies, demographics, and preferences.

**RESULTS:** Twenty-one parents of children with complex disabilities, 12 experts in children with complex disabilities, and 8 experts in adaptive sports programming responded to each respective survey. 100% of experts in children with complex disabilities agreed that individuals with disabilities would benefit socially, emotionally, and physically from an adaptive sports program. 85.8% of parents also agreed that their children would be willing to participate in an adaptive sports program designed specially for youth with complex disabilities. However, 81% of parents and 83.3% of experts in children with complex disabilities believed there is not enough opportunities for youth with complex disabilities to participate in adaptive sports. The parents' top choices of sports included bowling, kickball, and fishing while their least favorites included yoga, track and field, archery, and bocce ball. The adaptive programming experts' top sports that they offered include surfing, biking/cycling, paddle boarding, and basketball while the sports that no one offered included kickball, baseball, soccer, and volleyball. Top concerns of both parents and experts in children with complex disabilities include an inaccessible environment, sun exposure/heat, and travel time while their least notable concerns include elopement. Lastly, four qualitative themes were identified: adaptive sports are important for youth with complex disabilities, better marketing for these programs is needed, more adaptive sporting opportunities for this population are needed, and safety should be a top priority.

**CONCLUSION:** The results of this study will inform the development of the first adaptive multi-sports program in the Charleston, SC area that is specially designed for youth with complex disabilities. The creation of the new A.B.L.E. program will assure that every child, regardless of ability, will have an equal opportunity to participate in sports and recreation in his or her community.

## References

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